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Response Paper 2, “Big Blonde”

Dorothy Parker’s “Big Blonde” is a very realistic short story depicting the struggles of an average woman during the 1920s. Dorothy Parker’s entertaining and sarcastic style that describes the situation of the main character makes the reader forget that the situation is actually very common and relatable to people today. Parker focuses on the expectations and pressures put on women to fit a certain image. While the 1920s make people think of women’s independence and rights, Parker gives us a view of the ways upholding a certain image held women back during this time.

Single women were expected to be delighted by the attention of men and to please these men by showing a carefree attitude. The main character, Hazel Morse, spends most of her days before marriage having this pleasant carefree attitude simply because “men liked a good sport” and she enjoys the popularity (187). Single women had the other pressure to look beautiful making it important to get married while still young before the beauty began to fade. By the time Hazel marries Herbie Morse, she desires to be married because she is “nearing thirty now” and has “spread and softened (188).” Once married, Hazel feels relaxed and more open with her feelings than ever before. Herbie is not pleased with his new wife losing her “good sport” attitude, which goes along with the many expectations of a good housewife during this time. A housewife during this time was expected to keep a neat house and more importantly, to be cheerful and submissive to her husband. Hazel cares about her husband and loves married life so she tries to encourage him to stop drinking so much and to stay home more often. Herbie constantly describes her as a “crab” which leads her to eventually become a heavy drinker. Their marriage only goes downhill.

Herbie divorces Hazel after a few years and life doesn’t get any better for her. Now she must go back to the role of being a “good sport” without the model looks she once possessed when “it was still the day of the big woman (187).” Fashion begins to change in the 1920s favoring skinny women with boyish figures; whereas before, curvy women were models being seen as healthy, beautiful, and happy. Hazel’s “flabby white arms with pale tan spots” seem less and less attractive and it does not help that she is becoming more vain (187). She gets the attention of some men for being a “good sport” but it is obvious that they do not care about her because they don’t want to be with her when she is emotional (204). The pressures of society during the time and her self-pity lead her to attempt suicide (205).

Hazel’s pathetic attempt of suicide reflects the pathetic life she leads due to the pressures of society she has felt. Her looks are continually declining and she is feeling less up to being a “good sport” as she grows older. She continues to try to please men who are unattractive and “hard on her patience” just to have some form of “stability” in her life (202). A life in which looks are of utmost importance and one is always expected to be cheerful is not desirable. While the 1920s were supposed to be a time of newfound independence for women, women struggled to be independent when so much of their success depended on their image.